1: Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

THE KHASIS

SECTION I.

HABITAT.

101 162 THE Khasis reside in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills district of Assam. They number 176,614 souls, which total is made up of:—

Khasis	107,515
Syntengs	47,883
Christian Khasis	17,125
Khasis inhabiting other districts	4,091
	176,614

131 162 563 The Khasi and Jaintia Hills district is situated between 25° 1′ and 26° 5′ North Latitude, and between 90° 47′ and 92° 52′ East Longitude. It contains an area of 6,157 square miles, with a total population at the Census of 1901 of 202,250 souls. In addition to the Khasis there are some members of Bodo tribes inhabiting parts of the district.

The Lyngam tribe appears to have been reckoned in 1901 as Khasi, there being no separate record at the last Census of these people.

101 131 [133] 563 The district is split up into two divisions, the Khasi Hills proper and the Jaintia Hills. The Khasi Hills form the western portion of the district and the Jaintia Hills the eastern. The Khasis inhabit the Khasi Hills proper, and the Syntengs, or Pnars, the Jaintia Hills. The latter hills take their name from the Rajas of Jaintia, the former rulers of this part of the country, who had as their capital Jaintiapur, a place situated at the foot of the Jaintia Hills on the southern side, which now falls within the boundaries of the Sylhet

[P. J]

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district. The Lynngams inhabit the western portion of the Khasi Hills proper. A line drawn north and south through the village of Nongstoin may be said to form their eastern boundary, and the Kamrup and Sylhet districts their northern and southern boundaries, respectively. The people known as *Bhois* in these hills, who are many of them really Mikirs, live in the low hills to the north and north-east of the district, the term "Bhoi" being a territorial name rather than tribal. The eastern boundary of the Lynngam country may be said to form their north-western boundary. The Wárs inhabit the precipitous slopes and deep valleys to the south of the district. Their country extends along the entire southern boundary of the district to the Jadukata, or Kenchi-iong, river where the Lynngam territory may be said to commence towards the south. There are some Hadem colonies in the extreme eastern portions of the Jaintia Hills. It is these colonies which are sometimes referred to by other writers as "Kuki Colonies." They are settlers from the North Cachar Sub-division of the Cachar district within recent years. It is possible that the title Hadem may have some connection with *Hidimba*, the ancient name for the North Cachar Hills.

APPEARANCE.

The colour of the Khasi skin may be described as being usually brown, varying from dark to a light yellowish brown, according to locality. The complexion of the people who inhabit the uplands is of a somewhat lighter shade, and many of the women, especially those who live at Nongkrem, Laitlyngkot, Mawphlang, and other villages of the surrounding high plateaux, possess that pretty gipsy complexion that is seen in the South of Europe amongst the peasants. The people of Cherrapunji village are specially fair. The Syntengs of the Jaintia Hills are darker than the Khasi uplanders. The Wárs who live in the low valleys are frequently more swarthy than the Khasis. The Bhois have the flabby-looking yellow skin of the Mikirs, and the Lynngams are darker than the Khasis. The Lynngams are probably the darkest complexioned people in the

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	Khasi Hills.	Jaintia Hills.
1.	Lyngkah (Barpani or Khawang)	Kyllao. (Subtaga).
2.	Nongkrem	Pynsing.
3.	Um-long (Maolong the hat at Laban)	Maolong. (Nartiang).
4.	Rangbop (Jeo-lah at Cherra) (Mawtawar in Mylliem) (Umsaw in Nongkhlaw)	Mawiang. (Jowai).
5.	Shillong (Laitlyngkot)	Maohai. (Shangpung).
6.	Pomtih or Pomtiah (Mawkhar, small market)	Pynhat. (Myuni).
7.	Umsih	Thyne-hein.
8.	Yeo-duh (Mawkhar, large market)	Ka-hat. (Jaintiapur).

In the War country, markets are usually held every fourth day, e.g. at Nongjri, Mawlang, Tyllap, and Shella. At Therie the market is held every Friday, and at Hat-majai, or Bholaganj, every Tuesday.

THE LYNGAMS.

Although mention has been made incidentally in various parts of this monograph of Lyngam customs, it has been thought necessary to give the Lyngams a separate chapter, as these people differ so very greatly from the Khasis in their manner of life, and in their customs. *Lyngam* is the Khasi name: the Garo name for the Lyngams is *Megam*. There are several *Megam* villages in the north-eastern corner of the Garo Hills district, and there is regular communication kept up between these villages and the Lyngam inhabitants of the Khasi Hills district. The Lyngams must not be confused with the *Hajong* or *Nindaniya* Garos who inhabit the low hills to the north of the Khasi Hills district, and are called by the Khasis *Dio*. All Lyngams claim to be Khasis, they dislike being called Garos; but although it is true they speak what may be called a dialect of Khasi, and observe some of the Khasi customs, the Lyngams are more Garo than Khasi.* Before proceeding further, it should be stated that the Assamese of Boko call the Lyngams *Nonipá* Garos, all hill people being Garos to the Assamese of that region, without distinction

I: Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

or difference. It is owing to these three different names being used for the same people that there has been so much confusion about Lyngams previously; e.g. at one census they were named *Lyngam*, at another they received the appellation of Garo, and at a third enumeration they were called Khasis. In Section I. the habitat of the Lyngams has been roughly defined. It is impossible to define the Lyngam country exactly, because these people are continually shifting their village sites owing to the exigencies of *jhum* cultivation, which has been described in Section II. Some of the Lyngams preserve a tradition that they originally came from the Kamrup plains. It is interesting that a people, like the Garos in so many respects, should have the same idea as the Garos as to the hills on the south bank of the Brahmaputra not always having been their abode. The Garo legend is that they dwelt for some years in the Goalpara and Kamrup plains after they descended from Thibet, and before they moved to the Garo Hills; and there is unmistakable evidence of their occupation of both districts in the shape of certain Garo villages on both banks of the Brahmaputra for some little distance up the river. If, as I suspect, the Lyngams are an offshoot of the Garos, it is, perhaps, possible that they entered the Khasi Hills much in the same way as the Garos entered the hill district to which they have given their name. The Lyngams are much darker than the Khasis, and possess the Thibeto-Burman type of feature often to a marked degree. It is not extraordinary that they should have adopted some of the Khasi customs, for the Khasis, being the stronger people, would in course of time be bound to influence them in this respect. That the Lyngams observe the matriarchate and erect (some clans) memorial stones is not peculiar, because the Garos, like the Khasis, are also a matriarchal people (to a limited degree), and the custom of erecting memorial stones is not confined to the Khasis, for other hill tribes in Assam observe the practice, e.g. certain Naga tribes and the Mikirs; and the Garos themselves put up carved posts, called *kimo*, in honour of the departed. Although there is not much intermarriage between the Khasis and the Lyngams nowadays, perhaps in days gone by there was a mixture of blood, the result being the hybrid race we are now

10: Clarke U-3 (no date)1874 AR7 Khasi AR7

The STONE MONUMENTS *of the* KHASI HILLS. By C. B. CLARKE. [Communicated by Professor H. Fawcett, through Sir John Lubbock, Bart].*

131 THE Khasi Hills form a plateau, at a mean elevation of 4,500 feet above the sea, between the plain of Assam on the north and the plain of Sylhet on the south. They are inhabited by the 101 Khasi tribe, a people very distinct from the Hindoos north and south of them, and who are a branch of a race which extends eastward as far as South China. Immediately east of them are the Jaintea people, also called Sintengs, who are very closely allied in race and customs to the Khasi tribe. The 133 Jaintea country is physically a portion of the same plateau as the Khasi, and is only arbitrarily divided from it, and exhibits the same grassy hill-tops. The Khasi and Jaintea tribes together occupy the political district administered by the Deputy-Commissioner of Shillong, and the whole plateau is accordingly called the Shillong Plateau by Mr. Medlicott, the Dep.-Superintendent of the Geological Survey in India. Shillong is the English station which is the political capital. The plateau is remarkable for its freedom from the dense jungle which covers the neighbouring Himalayas at similar elevations; it is a fine rocky moor-like plateau, with isolated

* The woodcuts illustrating this paper have been kindly lent by Mr. Murray.

[p. 481]

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

133 the highest point is the Shillong Peak, 6,445 feet, covered with scrub,
137 grassland and forests (mostly oak, rhododendron and pine trees). The Jaintia Hills are considerably lower, with much flat land; wet paddy cultivation is practised here and there where sufficient water is available. From the plateau of the Khasi Hills northwards to the Assam Brahmaputra Valley there is a gentle slope covered with thick jungle, and the southern slope towards the Bengal plain is very steep, so that

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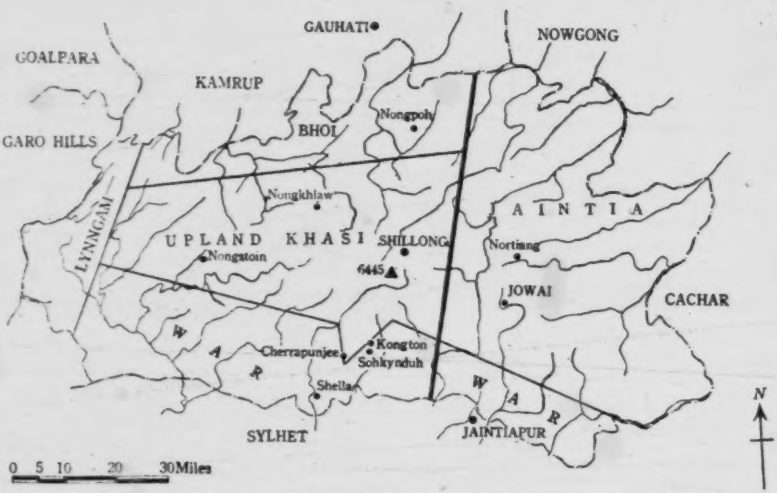

MAP. 8. — *Map of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills with Classification of Groups.*

133 the upland remained practically cut off from the plains until the
137 middle of the 19th century.

Following the geographical and ecological differences, the five
619 groups are segregated into fairly well-defined cultural areas, each developing a different economy and dialect:

[131]
[24]

1. The Jaintia[1] — associated mostly with wet rice cultivation.
2. The Khasi (upland Khasi) — practise potato cultivation with small-scale rice and maize cultivation.
3. The War — inhabit the southern slope of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills (they are called geographically the Khasi War and the Jaintia War). Due to the heavy rainfall, the soil is the most fertile in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The Khasi War practise jhuming of which the main yield is millet. In the lower part of this area, pan-leaf, betel-nut, and orange gardens are cultivated. The Jaintia War practise wet rice cultivation like most of the Jaintias, as well as pan-leaf cultivation.

1. They are called also the Synteng or the Pnar.

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

I. Setting and Economic Background of Sohkynduh and Kongton

Sohkynduh and Kongton are villages of the Kadashinong,[1] one of the areas under the Cherra Chief. The Kadashinong is situated on the southern slope of the Khasi Hills, in what is called War country. These two villages are situated at the farthest point from both Shella, the centre bordered by the plain, and Cherrapunjee, the seat of the Cherra Chief, one of the centres of the upland Khasi Hills. The people at Cherrapunjee say that these villages are one of the most backward parts of the Khasi Hills. They correspond to Rombagiri in the Garo Hills, as they lie in the innermost parts and more traditional economic and social settings have been preserved there than in other villages. These are also the reasons why I selected those villages as my field.

It is nine miles to Sohkynduh from Cherrapunjee, crossing two deep valleys towards the east. Kongton is located at the heart of the mountain ranges, ten miles from Cherrapunjee, towards the north-east. It is about twelve miles from Sohkynduh to Kongton, and the way leads through one of the most difficult passes, where even villagers seldom travel. In December, 1955, Sohkynduh was a community of 48 households (List 6), and Kongton of 62 households (List 9). The settlements of both villages are clustered in the southern depressions of a mountain, not far from the summit, a typical location of Khasi villages. Sohkynduh has poor soil, covered with plenty of pieces of stones. The yield therefore is very poor. On the other hand, Kongton, a much older village, enjoys fertile soil, and is one of the most prosperous communities in the Kadashinong.

The major economy of both villages is shifting cultivation. We have already seen, in the chapters on the Garo, the fundamental technique of "Jhuming cultivation." The differences between the Garo and the Khasi shifting cultivation are to be found in two aspects: one is the nature of the crops and the other is the type of landownership. In this area, the main crop is millet, while that of the Garo is rice. Besides the shifting cultivation, the Khasi have pan-leaf gardens and sometimes pineapple gardens, though on a small scale and not in every household. The most important feature of Khasi shifting cultivation is the development of private ownership. In the tribal areas in Assam, such private ownership of the jhum field is quite an

1. Kadashinong is the name of a group of villages. Its literal meaning is "twelve villages," and it comprises the following villages: Sohkynduh, Rymmai, Mawbawein, Mawshiut, Mawmang, Kongton, Shyntiang, Krohiawhiar, Pdei, Tenshun, Nongpriang, and Diengsaw. (Khasi spelling follows the customary usage in Cherra State.)

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7.

APPENDIX

SOME ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FROM SHELLA AND JATINGA

SHELLA

Shella is situated on the lowest of the southern slopes of the Khasi Hills, bordering on the Sylhet plain of East Pakistan. For centuries the people of Shella maintained close trading connections with the people of the plain, so that they have been much influenced by the Hindu. They have been to some extent divorced economically and culturally from their own people who live in the uplands and on higher part of the slopes. Actually, this is a natural result of their geographical location. From Cherrapunjee, the southern edge of the upland Khasi Hills, only a narrow footpath goes down to Shella. The altitude of Cherrapunjee is about 5,000 feet and of Shella from 500 to 1,000 feet, and the distance between them is 8 miles. The path descends very steeply and is full of hard stones. This difficulty of communication is also why the Hindu influence did not penetrate the upland Khasi, as in the case of the Jaintia Hills.[1]

This area has a unique political organization which differs from the majority of Khasi states who are traditionally ruled by the members of the Siem clan. Shella is organized as a confederation, called 'Shella Confederacy,' and consists of four local villages. The head of the village is called *wadadhar*, and is elected by the villagers every three years. The number of households of the Shella Confederacy was about 900 in January 1956. The names of the four villages and their *wadadhar* in 1956 were:

Name of village	*Name of wadadhar*
1. Shella	Devish Mohan Roy
2. Mushtoh	Ditojou Roy
3. Nongtrai	Orju Roy
4. Tyngnger	Jabuni Roy

Each village is divided into sections. For instance, Shella village has nine sections: (1) Jasir, (2) Disong, (3) Duba, (4) Jamau, (5) Nongrum, (6) Nongnong,

1. However, Shella was the only way out and the main gateway from the Khasi Hills to the plain; it was here that the British first entered the Khasi Hills. They proceeded from Shella to Cherrapunjee and made the latter headquarters of the Khasi Hills in 1833.

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

Shella

Confederacy forms a more marked endogamous community, through being cut off geographically and economically from the rest of the Khasi, and socially from the neighbouring Hindu people.

The Economy and the People.

Shella lies along the upper part of the Shella River and stretches upwards along the steep slope, looking down towards the Bengal plain. The climate of this part of the hills is considered to be one of the worst in tropical India for human habitation. The Bengal plain, though warmer than this area, is considered more healthy. This border land is the zone of malaria, typhoid, black fever, cholera, etc. None of the Bengalee peasants dare to live in such an area. However, it is the most fertile for products such as betel-nuts, pan-leaves, oranges, bananas and pineapples, and it also produces limestone. These people seem to prefer to settle in this zone and to enjoy its prosperity, at the expense of human lives: every year, especially between March and September, the inhabitants suffer from various fevers and dysentry and other diseaes, many of the weaker facing death.

Before the Partition of India and Pakistan, the products of Shella were carried down the Shella River to Sylhet, one of the biggest centres in East Bengal, which brought unimaginable wealth to the Shella people. Their houses were built by carpenters from Sylhet. The style and structure of these houses were exceptionally elaborate for the Khasi. They purchased vast rice fields in the plain, which used to be cultivated by Bengalee and Garo labourers engaged by them. These Khasi do not themselves know how to cultivate rice fields; they have always been managers or landowners. Their boys used to be sent to high schools and colleges in Sylhet. As a result of their trading with the Bengalee, many of them read and speak fluent Bengalee. There is no difference between their style of clothing and that of the Bengalee, though the women maintain their traditional dress in the Shella style.

They have thus been distinguished from the rest of the Khasi not only geographically, but also economically and culturally. Their personality also differs sharply from the rest of the Khasi. They are very sociable, and quick, a quality lacking among the Khasi of Sohkynduh and Kongton. They are clever enough to deal with strangers. The upland Khasi say Shella people are very cunning. This remark shows one side of these people. They had to be cunning, since they traded with the Sylhet Bengalee who were said to be the most cunning of their race. Their role in the trade and in the history of the modernization of the Hills was considerable. For centuries they represented intellectual Khasi owing to their contact with Hindu civilization, while the Hills remained in darkness. They assumed an important role when the British established an administration in the Hills, and even up to now, many leading Khasi originated from this area: for instance, Lati Hat, the first interpreter of the British Headquarters at Cherrapunjee; Jeebon Roy, who was the first Magistrate among the Khasi; Maham Sing, a lawyer and Member of the Legislative Assembly (the grandson of Jeebon Roy); Nichols Roy, Minister of Health and Prisons of the Assam Government, Member of the Legislative Assembly, and Missionary of the Church of God; R. R. Thomas (brother of Nichols Roy), Principal of the Gauhati University, etc.

Through constant cultural contact with Hindu, and encouraged by their economic prosperity, the Shella Khasi, like the Jaintias, have been much influenced by Hindu culture. However, this does not mean that the people of Shella adopted the Hindu beliefs. Though there is a small Hindu shrine, and some ceremonial elements were borrowed from the Hindu, most of the

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

wife who lives with him. [Shella] The Khasi woman lives with her mother. Some say the Khasi woman is his second wife, other say their marriage is not recognized by the public. 563

Actually, owing to the bad climate, very few non-Khasi live in this area. Besides the two non-Khasi just mentioned, there were a Bengalee tax collector and an Assamese Forest Officer, both of whom lived at Shella Bazaar. Bengalee villages are situated about five miles south of Shella. Except in the bazaar, Bengalee and Khasi have no social contact with each other, and intermarriages have been rare.

However, it is obvious that in the past the Khasi must have had many cases of intermarriage with Bengalee. Among the Khasi there is a clan called 'Dkhar.' The term 'Dkhar' is also used for the peoples of the plains: Bengalee are called 'Dkhar' by the Khasi. They say that the Dkhar clan originated in Bengalee girls who married Khasi men and who went to live in the Hills. It is said that in older days, the Khasi often raided the Sylhet plain and kidnapped Bengalee girls as well as goods. In Bengalee records of Sylhet, Khasi appear as 'bloody Khasi.' Khasi old men say that in order to increase their population they did sometimes kidnap Bengalee girls, but that they treated these girls very nicely and kindly, no differently from their own people. Since they follow the matrilineal system, they decided to name their descendants 'Dkhar.' It is said that all the present Dkhar people are descendants of such marriages. The Dkhar are found more on the southern slopes of the Khasi Hills i.e. among the Wars. 101 563

It seems there were many reasons for the descendants by marriage between the Khasi and the Bengalee to become Khasi. First of all, it is said that in the olden days the Khasi wanted to increase the population by such marriages. At the same time, a Bengalee who married a Khasi became an outcast from his or her own society owing to the caste system, and this inevitably made them Khasi. Secondly, the Khasi were primarily grouped into the *iing*, and they considered the marriage relation as of secondary importance. Hence it was rather difficult to remove by marriage a Khasi man or woman from their native place. Thirdly, Khasi could hardly live in the plain where no betel-nut or pan-leaf gardens were available; they could not engage in rice cultivation in the plain, as the technique is entirely different from the cultivation of betel-nut or pan-leaf. Moreover, they said they could not stand the heat in the plain. Therefore, the orientation of intermarriages was always towards the Khasi community: the Khasi brought outsiders to their own land; they did not themselves leave.

Such a marked tendency on the part of the Khasi to remain attached to their own homeland, is in no way contradictory with the phenomena of their migration to places outside the Khasi Hills, owing to the exploitation of their homeland and to the increase in population. The formation of Jatinga represents such an instance; there are also the cases of modern Khasi women from sophisticated urban areas, who easily leave their homeland, after marriage with a non-Khasi; this also appears in the following data on Jatinga. 161 167 [563]

JATINGA

Jatinga is a Khasi village situated in the North Cachar Hills, three miles west from Haflong, the headquarters of the North Cachar Hills. The number of households was about sixty in February 1956. Their economy depends on the pan-leaf, orange and pineapple gardens, similar to that of the Shella people. 131 621 433

13: Mukherjee E-5 (1954)1958 AR7 Khasi AR7

SOCIAL GROUPINGS AMONG THE KHASIS OF ASSAM

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Introduction

THE Khasis, who inhabit the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district of Assam, are matrilineal. Like the Garos, they, are matrilocal in residence. Exclusive ownership over family property is claimed by the Khasi women and the youngest daughter (*Ka-Khadduh*) who lives permanently in the house of her mother, is the custodian of the family property and the holder of religion (*Ka bat ka-niam*)[1].

This paper deals with the social groupings, namely, the clan, sub-clan and family, of the Khasis. The materials were collected in 1954 from Mawphlang, Cherapunji and Mamluh and Mawsmai villages farther south of the Chera State.

Discussion

In the language of the Khasi, the prefix *Ka* is usually used before the name of a woman or any object belonging to a woman (or considered feminine). The use of *Ka* as a prefix before the name of each social group is suggested to have bearing on Khasi matriliny. *Kur* is not a very expressive and exact term for a clan. *Kakur*, which is supposed to have sprung from the woman (*long jaid na ka kynthei*)[2] is more exact. Similarly, *Ka-K'poh* and *Ka-iing* denote the sub-clan and family respectively.

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[1] Gurdon, P. R. T., *The Khasis*, London, 1914 p. 88.

[2] Op, cit, page 82.

14:Roy I-5 (no date) 1938 AR7 Khasi AR7

IV. THE PLACE OF THE KHASI IN THE WORLD.

By

David Roy

131 [614] [611] [197] The Khasi country lies in the hills of the province of Assam in North East India. Khasi clans are exogamous and matrilneal, and the Khasis speak a MonKhmer language.

121 In speaking of the place of the Khasi in the world I intend to explain the Khasi's own view of his relation to other peoples of the world.*

829 The Khasi is very conscious of his importance. He says a Khasi claims to be the centre of the world. The Khasi has acquired such a feeling of self-importance from his great confidence in himself; and this confidence he has derived from the position in which his relationship-terminology represents him as standing with respect to himself and the world around him. Or, rather, his relationshisp terms and language are an expression of his attitude and notions.

601 The Khasi says—*Ka Kamie* (mother)

U Khun (son) — *Ka Kmie* (mother)

Which is=His mother

Himself (male) — His sister (female)

He calls this the family. Then he says—

Ka Kamie Kha (Father's mother)

U Kpa Kha (Father, Father's brother) (male) — *Ka Nia Kha* Father Father's sister (female)

[114] The writer of th is article is himself a Khasi (Christian).

16: McCormack E-4,5 (1956-1958) 1964
[P. 105 B] AR7 Khasi AR7

NORTHERN UPLAND GROUPS

KHASIS[1]

Synonyms. *Cassia, Cossyah, Kasia, Kassia, Kassya, Kasya, Khasia, Khasiah, Khassi, Khassia, Khosia* 101

ORIENTATION. **Identification and location.** The term Khasi has often been applied to that entire 101 131 197 114 122

[1] This account of Khasi culture, contributed by Anna P. McCormack, is based on field work during 1956-58 in the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District. The author wishes to emphasize that her data are on the upland Khasis who inhabit the center of the District. She gratefully acknowledges support of the field work from the Department of Anthropology of the University of Chicago, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc., and the Ford Foundation, for one of its Foreign Area Training Fellowships.

group of matrilineal and Mon-Khmer-speaking people who claim as their ancestral homeland the present-day United Khasi–Jaintia Hills District (within approximately 90° 47′ and 92° 52′ E. and 25° 5′ and 26° 5′ N.). This group includes the Jaintias (also Pnar or Synteng) in the southeast, who differ from the Khasis primarily in their duolocal residence pattern and less virulent forms of sorcery. (The Hadem in eastern Jaintia are a Kuki people.) It also includes the Lyngngams (also spelled Lynngam) in the west, who practice migratory swidden agriculture and certain peculiar funerary rites, and are said by Ehrenfels (1955) to be culturally intermediate between Khasis and Garos. Finally, it includes Bhois, Wars, and upland Khasis, which terms are primarily territorial. Bhoi country is the north-central part of the District, and is culturally complicated by the presence of Mikirs, Lalungs, and Nepalis. War country spans the entire southern length of the District, so that Wars divide into Jaintia Wars and Khasi Wars; of these, the Khasi Wars have traditionally transmitted property to sons as well as to daughters. The upland center of the District is the country of the Khasis proper, those whose culture provides the most useful model for interpreting the variations found elsewhere. [For general reference on all categories of Khasi culture, cf. Costa 1936 and 1937; also Gurdon 1907, especially for data on regional variations.] **Geography.** The District is 5,554 square miles of hilly tableland, intricately dissected by numerous rivers, and marked by significant ecological variation over very short distances. The tablelands step gently downward north from Shillong Peak, which at 6,445 feet is the highest point in the District, and over about 55 miles ease into the Brahmaputra valley where this is some 250 feet above sea level. To the south, the land slopes more steeply downward for about 20 miles, and then drops abruptly, in cliff and steep-slope formations, to the Ganges sea-level delta that begins at its north with Sylhet. The annual southwest monsoons drop torrential rains around Cherrapunji and Mawsynram villages (for Cherrapunji, a record 805 inches in 1861), but then, reaching Shillong 33 miles to the northeast, provide only about 100 inches per year. Rainfall is again greater in Bhoi, which shares the Brahmaputra valley climate. Climate is temperate on the high Shillong plateau, where it seldom freezes and never snows. To the north, climate becomes subtropical. forest is jungly, and fauna abound. The climate to the south is also subtropical. [Cf. Hooker 1891: chap. XXIX.] **Linguistic affiliation.** Khasi is one of the major Mon-Khmer languages, related to Mon, Khmer, Semang-Sakai, Nicobarese, and Palaung-Wa. The major Khasi dialects are Khasi, Jaintia, and Lyngngam, to which Grierson adds War. Further minor variations occur from village to village. The Khasis had no script until 1842, when the roman alphabet was successfully applied to the Cherrapunji dialect of Khasi proper. [Cf. Rabel 1961; Grierson 1903-28: 2; Bareh 1962.]

101 131 197 101 184 162 563 [59] [154] [24] [769] [114] [428] [113] 133 [131] 132 [113] 197 [212] [113]

17: Banerjee E-5 (1955) 1962 AR7 Khasi AR7
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THE KHASI FESTIVAL OF 'POMBLANG'

S. BANERJEE

INTRODUCTION

The Khasi inhabit the upland of the central part of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district of Assam. They reckon descent through mother and the youngest daughter (Ka khadduh) of the house is the custodian of the ancestral property. Belief in the existence of spirits is strong among them and the causes of diseases are ascertained by taking recourse to the process of divination. They are ruled by different categories of Chief. The *Siem* is the highest official responsible for the administration of the state but a few small states are also governed by *Sirdars* with same powers as vested in the former although does not possess the same status. It is interesting to note that their priest whose rank is next to *Siem*, have also been allotted to perform this secular duties in some of the regions of the Khasi country. The Chief function through their respective council comprising elected members from different administrative units. He is rather subservient to this body as he is liable to be censured or even dismissed, if his activities are not in conformity with the Khasi traditional usage. Most of his directives are implemented through the assistance of his subordinates who are in-charge of various sections of the State. The Khasi place his grievance first to these junior officers for redress and justice, after which an appeal can be preferred to the *Siem* or any other higher officer as the case may be. One of the eminent States of the Khasi people known as Khyriem, where this festival is celebrated, consists of eight units for administrative convenience under the supervision of different grades of officials who participated in this celebration along with the *Siem* as representatives of the people.

The Khasi festival of *Pomblang* (Goat killing) described below used to be celebrated at one time in Shillong when the Khasi states of Khyriem and Mylliem were not separated. The first chief of the Khyriem state U Singh Manik shifted his headquarters to Nongkrem village after partition of the kingdom, which occured before the arrival of the British. He again moved to Langkerdem after a brief stay at the village of Lyngshing. He performed this festival as long as he was there, transferring it again to Nongkrem where he re-settled again. It was celebrated here for a long time and consequently it was named after this village. Although the ruling family had later on shifted its residence about sixty years ago to the present village Smit, during the time of U Klur Singh, Siem, it is performed regularly as *Nongkrem dance* which was observed by the author from 21st June to 25th June, 1955.

OBJECT OF THE FESTIVAL

It is being held every year since the days of U Shillong who was supposed to be the founder of original Khyriem State. They celebrate it to perpetuate his memory and pay homage with a view to ensure rain, good harvest, eliminating diseases and famine. He was worshipped along with other ancestors with view to guide the present Chief in his discharge of his duties and for the welfare of the people.

The house of Siem (iing-sad) where the rites are observed, is considered sacred. It consists of a big-hall (shlur) in the centre, surrounded by rooms. One of these on the north is used as a kitchen room (iing-chetja) where ritual

19: Assam G-5 (1958) 1963 AR7 Khasi AR7

CHAPTER III

The Border Area

121 131 **3. 1 Definition of Border Area.**—The term 'border areas' although very frequently used does not refer to any well demarcated area. It was, therefore, decided after a joint discussion between the Director of Statistics with the Deputy Commissioner of the district and Subdivisional Officer, Jowai, that area within 20 miles of the Indo-Pak border line would be considered as the 'border area' for the purpose of the present survey. The list of the villages falling in this area was supplied by the Deputy Commissioner and the Subdivisional Officer.

[16] **3. 2 Condition of the Border Area before partition.**—The border area under review thus comprised of the southern slopes of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and a narrow strip of plains adjoining the southern slopes running along the Pakistan border. The area extends laterally over a length of about 120 miles, roughly from Maheskhola on the west to Sonapur on the east thus covering an area of 2,400 sq. miles approximately, comprising of 454 villages inhabited by population of 74 thousands.

245 311 [482] Barring the barren and rocky top plateaus the slopes are utilised or the production of valuable cash crops on intensive scale. These slopes provide suitable soil and climate for the production crops like arecanut, tezpatta, betel-leaf, oranges; pineapples and other fruits. On account of rich yields which such plantations give to the cultivators these slopes were, more densely inhabited and intensively cultivated than would appear possible from the topography of the area. Even the most inaccessible tracts in the slopes has been converted into rich orchards, wherefrom the produce was carried by headloads over steep gradients for several miles. Due to steep gradients little other use, except some jhuming here and there, could be made of this area.

439 Because of the very topography, this land had its natural connections with Sylhet district now forming part of East Pakistan. From time immemorial the area had a flourishing trade with Sylhet district. It was a two-way traffic. The cash crops found eager buyers in the people of Sylhet, from whom in turn the people in the border area obtained supplies of rice, fish, vegetables and other necessities of daily life. Thus in prepartition days they enjoyed a very prosperous and settled economy. The rich buildings in the border area villages which are now tottering away, bear eloquent testimony to the past prosperity of the border economy.

439 458 648 With the partition of the country in 1947, trade with the plains of Sylhet, now forming part of East Pakistan, was restricted. As a result the whole economy of this region was completely shattered and the countryside which once hummed with activity and abundance was over-shadowed with unemployment, poverty and despair. All the cash crops the mainstay of the border people lost the market in East Pakistan. for want of communication facilities the produce could not be

20: Hunter G-4 (no date) 1897 AR7 Khasi AR7

STATISTICAL ACCOUNT

OF THE

KHASI AND JAINTIA HILLS.

THE DISTRICT OF THE KHASI AND JAINTIA HILLS, called by the inhabitants Ka Ri Khási and Ka Ri Synteng, is situated between 26° 9′ 30″ and 25° 8′ 28″ north latitude, and between 91° 9′ 0″ and 92° 51′ 30″ east longitude. It contains an approximate area of 6157 square miles, and a population, according to the Census of 1872, of 141,838 souls. The principal town and Civil Station, which is also the headquarters of the Chief Commissioner of Assam, is Shillong, situated in 25° 32′ 39″ north latitude and 91° 55′ 32″ east longitude.

BOUNDARIES.—The Khási and Jáintiá Hills District is bounded on the north by the Districts of Kámrúp and Nowgong; on the east by Northern Cáchár, the Nágá Hills District, and the Kapilí river; on the south by Sylhet District; and on the west by the Gáro Hills.

JURISDICTION.—The Khási and Jáintiá Hills constitute a Political District, removed from the jurisdiction of the ordinary Criminal, Civil, and Revenue Courts, and of the offices established under the General Regulations and Acts. The administration of the country is vested in the Chief Commissioner of Assam, the Deputy-Commissioner of the Khási and Jáintiá Hills and his Assistants, and the native Chiefs, who are variously styled Siems, Wáhadádárs, Sardárs, Dollois, Pathors, and Lyngdohs. Siem, or more properly Seim, is derived from the Khási word for 'soul, life;' Wáhadádár, from the Hindu term *uhdádár*, meaning an 'officer;' Lyngdoh strictly means a 'sacrificial soothsayer,' from the Khási *ong*, 'to speak,' and *doh*, 'flesh.' The District is divided into three portions, —namely, British possessions in the Khási Hills; petty dependent

21: Ehrenfels E-4,5 (1950) 1953 AR7 Khasi AR7

on a historical past, different from that of the Khasi proper, the former having been ruled by the powerful, but somewhat Hinduised dynasty of the Jaintia Rajas until the Jaintia Wars of the British; the latter by small independent chiefs. Yet Jaintia social organization appears on the whole to preserve the matrilineal social structure clearer and to be less influenced by plains-acculturation, than that of the Khasi, though a few features of Brahmanical religious observances and also some traces of racial admixture are found in the immediate vicinity of Jowei, the former summer residence of the Jaintia Rajas. Stronger no doubt, than this influence, was that exercised by the British and non-Assamese Indians in the provincial capital Shillong since 1866. Methods of agriculture and other aspects of material civilization differ but little in the Jaintia- and Khasi plateau-areas.

The same cannot be said of both: the Wár-Khasi and Wár-Jaintias. Linguistically their affiliations are with the Khasi or Jaintias respectively, in the plateau-areas. Economically, however, both Wár-groups form a separate pan-leaf cultivating unit in the little accessible steep southern slopes of the Khasi- and Jaintia Hill massif. Both Wár-groups live in the environment of luscious tropical flora and fauna, sharply differentiated from the cool, barren plateau with its perennial winds and the heroic, if solitary beauty of its highland heaths, which forms the background of both the Khasi- and Jaintia plateau-groups.

The age of the Wár-Khasi and -Jaintias, as one independent economic, — and two half-independent dialectical linguistic entities, is an intricate problem. The two Wár-groups subsist on pan-leaf cultivation as a money crop, grown in the thick tree-gardens as creepers; not on food-cultivation, as do the plateau-groups, because there is insufficient space on the steep slopes, for vegetable gardens or -fields. The pan-leaf cultivators therefore depend on food, purchased from outside. The slopes seem to have been uninhabited until not long ago. Yet pan-leaf chewing is such an integral part of Khasi life, that until quite recently, and occasionally even now, a distance between two places is not measured by the number of hours used for walking, but by the number of betelnut- and pan-leaf packages, consumed on the way. Also the common benediction among Khasi expresses the wish that so and so may eat pan in the Garden of God. Yet pan-cultivation and the settlements of the Wár-people as pan-leaf cultivators in the southern slopes seem comparatively young. Pan-cultivation on the plateau is impracticable. It is therefore possible that pan was for a long time only a much valued import article from the plains, bartered against Khasi ore and iron tools, though it is now an export article from the Wár-country, brought to the markets of the plains, by both Wár-Khasi and Wár-Jaintia women and men.

According to a tradition, across which I came among the Nonglamin clan of the Nongmuker village, the ancestors of the present Wár people were on the plateau at a time when no pan-cultivation was going on in the slopes and none of the present big estates of pan-tree gardens was yet held by their present (Wár-) owners. A not distant ancestor of a Nonglamin clan-member who about two or three generations ago told the story to U Siang (one of

31: Scherman--71 E-4 (no date) 1915 AP1 Burma
Khasi AK7

101 Of the sub-divisions of these people, the Khasi
131 proper (74)--1911: 120,933--live in the Khasi

74. P.R.T. Gurdon, The Khasis (London, 1907), pp. 1 ff. about house construction pp. 30 ff.

Hills, the kindred Synteng in the Jaintia Hills. The Lynn Gam who are classified by Gurdon as half Khasi and half Garo live in the western part of the Khasi Hills, the people who inhabit the low hill country in the north of the district, which is usually called "Bhoi," are named the Bhoi. Many of them are really Mikir. My obser-
361 vations of the Khasi are limited to the surrounding of Shillong from where I visited the village of Nongkrem which is about 13 kilometers away (75).

75. Cf. C. Becker, Anthropos 4 (1909), pp. 892-902.

The place is located in a trough between low hills which are covered by large stone boulders. A small water course runs through the village. The huts are partly built along the slopes of the hills which surround the village. The houses
342 (Plate X, 4) all stand on small plots of land which are separated from each other by low stone walls; a narrow passage leads to them from the front side. Sometimes this passage is completely missing, in which event one has to climb over the wall. The houses stand on foundations of layers of irregular stone boulders. The walls are made of wooden boards--sometimes of bamboo--and are covered on the outside by grass. Grass is also used for roofing. Each strand is tied individually to bamboo poles, as in Burma (not as in Bengal where it is squeezed together between bamboo poles). Especially typical is the form of the roof; it is high and steep in the middle and the roof ridge is curved. The roof slopes down